

# **The Future of Television: Linking Local Cultures in a Global World**

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## **Abstract**

### **The Future of Television: Linking Local Cultures in a Global World**

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This thesis examines the rising popularity and significance of global television companies that produce and sell formats. As the world becomes increasingly more global, global television companies like Endemol are thriving because they are able to transmit formats to fit individual countries. Within these countries, local cultures and standards apply to the viewing of television content. Endemol has learned to remain present globally and locally at the same time.

This thesis explores how Endemol is able to find success within local markets by interviewing media managers of the company's Malaysian branch directly. They revealed some of the challenges they face when adapting formats, specifically those developed by Endemol USA and Europe. Further highlighted is the importance of the role of media managers as gatekeepers, specifically how they are able to tap into local environments to produce successful local shows and reach high television ratings in these markets. Endemol Malaysia has to decide solely which shows will work on air while considering the different languages, dialects, races and politics of the country.

By the end of the thesis, it is interesting to note how Endemol Malaysia differs from the Endemol Global brand. They are moving in a slower direction, often in different directions because of a few factors such as the economy, the government role and slower advancement in technologies. It is clear that media managers are the filters that adapt content based on factors that might be overseen by the headquarters.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

A show like *Fear Factor* is exhilarating for the television audience, who watch contestants push through mental and physical challenges to walk away with a large cash prize. Looking at the comedy genre, *The Office* is also successful for its ‘mockumentary’ style format and humor. Shows like *Fear Factor* and *The Office* have been duplicated in numerous countries, such as in the US and the UK. But which version of *The Office* is more humorous and which of the *Fear Factor* versions more exciting? Perhaps at first glance you may think the answer is a matter of opinion, but our liking toward one or the other is probably deeply influenced by the culture and society we live in, amongst other factors. Endemol Malaysia is a global television company that knows and understands how people relate to television content depending on these factors. The company produces multiple formats of the same television show to sell to different countries. Each version is tweaked and adjusted to appeal to the culture in which the show is being sold to. The company acknowledges that they are providing a cost-effective solution for broadcasters as they use one set to produce different versions of the same show “reducing costs and delivering production value that would otherwise not be possible in many territories” (Endemol, 2012).

Endemol began in The Netherlands, founded by Joop van den Ende and John de Mol (Talpa Media Holding, 2011). It developed into an international company with 80 branches in over 31 countries (Endemol, 2012). Endemol is an example of a company that is emerging as a result of globalization. In the most noticeable way, they are using technology to expand their television shows to reach a global audience. However, for the longest time, the USA has been the dominant cultural format amongst global formats

(Keane and Moran, 2008). However, It is interesting to note how television shows from countries like the UK are having an influence over the production of American television especially when examining channels like the PBS in America (Kunz, 2010). When narrowing down over twenty different formats to just looking at the UK and the USA, the language barrier is not of a concern. Different versions between these two countries are being produced because production companies obviously feel this is a necessity for the success of the shows. For instance, deciding to duplicate *The Office* (which originally began airing in the UK) for an American audience is not cost-effective at all, but they felt the need to go ahead with the production because previous British shows that aired in its original format had failed (Beeden and Bruin, 2010). In this thesis, I hope to be able to explore the importance of adaptations for production companies and media managers, so they can meet the needs of the television audience and to further emphasize Endemol's role in this new phenomenon.

Endemol is known for its original and successfully sold productions of *Big Brother*, *Deal or No Deal* and *Wipeout* amongst others (Endemol, 2012). Although they have been predominantly selling reality television and game shows, they are slowly expanding into drama, comedy, sport, docu-dramas, animation, features and feature films (Endemol, 2012). They are therefore an important development for television companies because they are a global company moving forward in an expansionary way. They are globally expanding national television programs and it is interesting to see how the world is responding. This research will explore the role of media managers at a subsidiary of Endemol in Malaysia to gain more understanding into the way countries are still trying to



hold onto nationalism, despite the global expansion of television. Nationalism is essentially all the characteristics, culture and social standards that define a nation.

The thesis will conclude by examining a subsidiary of Endemol, specifically looking into of its divisions in Malaysia, and understanding how this particular subsidiary balances the company's global corporate goals with the need to adapt locally appealing television shows.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Globalization and the Growth of Formats

Giddens (1990) describes globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p. 34). Endemol is a company made possible by globalization. They are a company that is able to use the improvements of technology (internet and mobile technology) and television to expand their business overseas as content providers (Moran and Malbon, 2006, p. 93). They operate efficiently because they can easily communicate with their business chains in other countries and gain local insight because of this.

Waisbord (2004) suggests that television is shaped by globalization and the pull of local and national cultures. Continuing this point, the creation of formats supports the idea that television remains tied to local and national cultures. Formats are the “basis of a new program, a program manifesting itself as a series of episodes, the episodes being sufficiently similar to seem like installments of the same program and sufficiently distinct to seem like different episodes” (Moran, 1998, p. 13). Referring back to Endemol, the company has found success creating and selling formats of programs to different countries. Each show is essentially the same format, but contain different elements that make it appealing to the country in which it is being sold to. Countries are continuing to demand local versions of programs.

Keane and Moran (2008) argue that today there is a “deepening of international trade in television programs” and that this has “contributed positively to diversity” (p. 1). They believe that the internationalization of television has aided in the progress of television as a medium. Globalization and the development of technology have also affected the way we view the producer and consumer relationship in the media environment. No longer do people want to merely stare at the television without feeling like they are a part and process of the production. Keane and Moran (2008) understand this concept when they introduce the idea of television formats ‘new engines’. An example might include the role of the audience in *American Idol* and *The Voice* as they vote for the eventual winner of the season. Television has had to adapt and change their strategy against competition from increasingly personal media technologies. Formats have used these ‘new engines’ in the show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. The success of the show has a lot to do with the added value the audience might receive in feeling part of the contestants stress as they attempt to work their way up to the large cash prize. In Asia, when large amounts of money as a cash prize was used, such as the large prize in *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, audiences swarmed to watch the show (Keane et al, 2007, p. 97)

However, Keane and Moran (2008) suggest that the popularity of formats has resulted in a lot of weaker versions of successful shows. The number of weaker similar shows being developed implies that a lot of poor quality programs are airing at the moment. Accordingly, Keane and Moran (2008) suggest that imitations develop because of a number of reasons. Firstly, television shows are by and large costly projects to develop and not all countries have the resources to produce brand new shows. Therefore, they use what they can to limit the cost of producing these television formats. Secondly,

imitation is common with international franchising so they have the appearance of being a success. Thirdly, television is a risky business in general and it is always less risky to copy someone else's successful idea than to create a brand new concept that has not been tested yet in the market. Keane and Moran (2008) conclude that along with a response to technological developments, "the television industry is a calculated response to the challenge of globalization and a consequence of fractured demand for finished programming." (p. 7).

### *Endemol's Presence in the World Today*

Television executives are wary of taking risks in the television business. Magder (2004) believes that executives are sticking to established program genres and avoiding the challenge of coming up with entirely new productions. Spin-offs, sequels, recycled and copied shows are usually considered before embarking on a new show. This is why reality television is a safe choice, especially in the USA where the strength of European program suppliers is becoming more and more apparent. Magder (2004) discusses Endemol's presence in the US Television market. He suggests that Endemol consults with local producers on the adaptation of a show, where fundamental elements are left in. In *Big Brother* universal elements translated cross culturally include the closed set, length of time, weekly elimination, etc. However, formats are still more frequently used outside the USA, as other countries cannot afford the trial and error approach of which the USA uses in developing hit shows.

On the other hand, viewers have expressed an outspoken preference for homemade fiction (De Bens and de Smaele, 2001). This point coincides with the business

success of projects like Endemol. Chalaby (2005) supports this statement with the idea that television channels present a “challenge” to national cultures and sovereignty. Thus, unlike Keane and Moran’s (2008) more positive outlook on the role of globalization of television in bringing countries closer together, Chalaby (2005) argues that there is one such global culture because of it. The global “supplants” the local and there is a distancing of the importance of nationalism and culture. Chalaby (2005) notes that people prefer to watch home-made television programs and this has prompted local companies to adapt their international feeds to local tastes. Chalaby (2005, p. 3) notes that this need for localization can be seen through the formation of international television networks, as they create local channels around a core broadcasting philosophy.

Waisboard (2004) suggests that this attempt to meet local tastes can be seen in the development of formats. He states, “formats reveal the globalization of the business model of television and the efforts of international and domestic companies to deal with the resilience of national cultures” (p. 360). Companies like Endemol and FremantleMedia are examples of international, global companies that have contributed to the popularity of distributing formats because national cultures are resilient to the single global culture that attempts to supplant the local. Magder (2004) believes that the use of formats in the reality television genre has led to three significant changes occurring. Firstly, product placement or product integration is a new way to cover costs. Since the emergence of DVR’s, advertisers have tried to stop people from being able to skip through commercials (Magder, 2004). By integrating sponsors directly in a program, such as *American Idol* being sponsored by AT&T, the company is mentioned through the use

of the phone-line. In addition, production costs for the show is brought down as companies invest money directly to the production.

Secondly, television has seen importance placed on merchandise tie-ins. The *American Idol* video game is one example that uses the name of the television show to appeal to the gaming audience. Lastly, the integration of other media with television is on the rise. In *American Idol*, you can download the songs contestants sung the previous night to your computer or your phone, which has contributed in bringing in revenue on top of their \$ 903 million USD advertising revenue in 2008 (Wyatt, 2009). Since 2002, Endemol has unveiled a new corporate strategy that is to capitalize on trends and produce interactive multimedia content (Magder, 2004). Endemol believes that people will gladly pay for extra content to their phones and other media devices, allowing them to profit off being multi-platform (Magder, 2004).

Endemol is not the only global production company, although it is one of the bigger ones. Granada Productions, from the UK, is another example of a European commercial television production company and global distributor. They produce highly rated shows in the UK like *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale* and *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* Granada (which now goes by ITV Studios except in Australia) has expanded globally to the USA, Germany and Australia. An example of a popular show by ITV Studios America is *Hell's Kitchen* (ITV Studios America, n.d). However, they have not expanded to the same number of countries as Endemol (which has more offices in Asia and Europe).

Another company, FremantleMedia is Europe's largest television and radio broadcast company, with interests in 40 television and 34 radio stations in 10 countries and worldwide production (FremantleMedia, 2009). They have produced *Pop Idol* and its spin-off's like *American Idol*. The company also has the licensed rights to international formats of popular shows like *The Apprentice*, *The Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency*, *America's Got Talent*, *Neighbours* an Australian show, etc. These companies are well aware of the value that is being held in the production and acquisition of formats, as Moran (2008) notes that FremantleMedia (which was previously The All American Fremantle Entertainment) had to add value to the formats by moving into international production. However, flows of content as addressed earlier have mostly been in a one-way direction from the USA or other dominant media countries like the UK. Endemol is currently still the world's largest independent production company (Endemol, 2012).

Moran and Mulborn (2006) note that in 2003, the Endemol group had a combined turnover of 616.4 million pounds (approximately \$992.9 million USD) and had increased since 2002. Mediaset and Time Warner have both expressed interest in buying over the company, with Time Warner's offer having been rejected because creditors think it is worth more than the offer of \$1.6 billion USD (NASDAQ, 2011).

### *The Role of Regional Producers in Adapting Global Franchises*

Waisbord and Jafin (2009) outline the important role of producers within local companies who adapt global franchises. Firstly, they believe that the basic function for producers is to ensure they are able to localize the show to maximize potential profits (p. 368). 'Glocalization' involves two processes, where a global media business has both a

multicultural strategy and sensitivity to the local culture for the pursuit of profit (p. 378). They note that the constant blending of global and local cultural forms is ideal. The role of these regional producers are important as gate-keepers as they make business decisions based on their own understanding of local culture. For example, producers might look at the format of a television show to access what cultural aspects may be “lost in translation” or “deemed offensive” (Waisbord & Jaflin, p.65).

In addition, Waisbord and Jaflin (2009) suggest that producers are more concerned with the present and what goes on culturally today than in the past. Localization is an effort from producers to make content real through national reality at that specific time, with intent of developing cultural bonds through humor, etc. They compare this process with that of newsgathering where journalists report news as it happens, capturing ‘reality’. In conclusion, Waisbord and Jaflin (2009) agree that the role of the producer is dominant and important in shaping cultural taste. As mentioned, the state of the economy is also placed in the minds of producers when, for example, they consider how much reward money to give out to contestants (where the value of rewards are always significantly lower than in the USA).

However, Waisbord and Jaflin (2009) are aware that ideal viewers for producers are mass audiences, which suggests that they want to minimize “cultural discount” (p.70). Cultural discount is a term originally used by Hoskins and Mirus, meaning “a particular program rooted in one culture, and thus attractive in that environment will have a diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values and behavioral patterns of the material in question” (1987, p.23). They are not overly concerned with nurturing a culturally peaceful environment, but their goal is to present a



television environment that will hopefully resonate with as many people as possible within a specific culture.

Kjus (2009) was interested in examining the changing television environment and its effect on those involved in the process. In the past, the most obvious relationship in the television industry was that between a broadcaster and production company. Today, there are significantly more agents involved in the making of each show and new forms of collaboration and specialization are surfacing. Each agent plays their own part, taking revenue from other agents or selling various forms of access to the audience and advertising time to sponsors (p. 289).

Kjus (2009) studies TV2 in Norway, which has the rights to distribute *Idol*. He writes that as interactivity is increasingly apparent in reality television and because of this, they had to allocate personnel to program productions to exploit the commercial potential of new media. For example, *Idol* uses the phone-voting system that likely involved the creation of a new department in charge of managing and counting the votes. Kjus (2009) also agrees with Magder (2004) in understanding the way reality television has managed to expand television beyond the television set. YouTube, an outside agent, has become very involved in the *Idol* shows, where fans can now search and re-watch specific performances. Although there are issues where copyright infringement is involved, the videos found on YouTube could essentially promote the show further.

### *Benefits of Formats*

Examining formats in closer detail, Moran (1998) looks at the history of the regulation of formats. He notes that The US Copyright Act of 1976 states that television

program formats are copyrightable. He uses the example of *The Bill Cosby show* and the initial idea being suggested by Hwesu Murray. Murray submitted a written proposal for five new shows to NBC's line-up. One of the shows was a story about a black middle-class family. This proposal expanded to two pages, even leading up to the selection of *Bill Cosby* to take the lead roles. However, NBC later turned down the script and instead produced *The Bill Cosby Show*. Murray filed against the company for "infringement of the format and breach of implied contract" (p. 141). However, the complaint was dismissed on the grounds that Murray's format lacked sufficient novelty to sustain a misappropriation action. A following appeal was upheld the next year. The point being made here is that format ideas have been difficult to copyright.

The BBC has seen many of its program ideas imitated and has attempted to legalize their material. The BBC began to set license fees for the use of its program ideas. The public company established its licensing division in 1991 (BBC, 2012). The BBC decided not to sell formats of shows to other regions until the sales life of the show came to an end. This usually happened with situation comedy and drama shows, such as the hit British television drama *Absolutely Fabulous* before it was sold (Moran, 1998, p. 27). Since formats have been legalized, it is seemingly more difficult to plagiarize off content. In relation, Moran (1998) writes that de-regulation, privatization and the advent of new distribution technologies has led to a multiplication of television channels available within national boundaries. This has paved the way for global television companies like Endemol, who use new distribution technologies to sell its products and services.

De Bens and de Smaele (2001) question how to fill those channels. As mentioned, the import of low-cost, foreign programs has been significantly important in order to fill

the channels with content. Moran (2008) also understands formats as the cheaper solution to this problem. Although local produced programs may be slightly more expensive than simply importing shows, they may have more success as national shows because the language, host, local contestants, references, prizes and so on are more similar to their culture than before. Moran (2008) concludes that this may also likely contribute to higher ratings and more advertising revenue.

### *Importing and Exporting Content in the USA*

Keane and Moran (2008) suggest that the USA is the 'Super A' market, where payments for episodes of formats are highest. This comes as no surprise because the USA has always been regarded as the leader of many markets, including television. As Varis (1984) noted, the USA accounted for over 40% of all program hours exported worldwide, including 44% of hours imported by Western Europe. Hoskins and Mirus (1988) believe that the USA dominates the international trade of television programs because of the 'Hollywood tradition' - tied into the commercial and competitive nature of US television. This increased competition leads to higher quality productions and tried-and-tested entertainment programming. As these programs are seen in other countries, people become familiar with the Hollywood stars and find it easier to identify with the films and shows in which they star, breaking some cultural boundaries.

De Bens and de Smaele (2001) write that US fiction has succeeded in breaking all cultural barriers on European television, whereas the distribution of European fiction is still mostly limited to Europe itself. American dominance over television programs in Europe become noticed when there was a launch of commercial channels in the 1980s.

With the increase in airtime, programmers had to find material to fill in. Because American fiction was cheaper than producing domestic content, exporting American programs was the better alternative. De Bens (1994) called this period the ‘Dallasification’ of television, referring to the homogenizing effect of American programs. In De Bens and de Smaele’s (2001) study of fiction imports in Europe, they found that only 17.4% of their programs were of national origin, whereas the other 82.6% were foreign programs, mostly of American origin. Accordingly, they share similar views with Hoskin and Mirus (1988) in that they believe certain themes of the ‘Hollywood tradition’ have encouraged the expansion of television in this manner. They describe these ‘Hollywood tradition’ themes as love, jealousy, hatred, ambition and the lust for money. American material is also described as providing ‘escapist dream material’ combined with the ‘hope for a better life’ (De Bens & de Smaele, 2001, p. 66). To further expand on the dominant flow of American television shows, the European commission found that 80% of the films made in the EU never leave the country of origin (p. 68). This astounding figure conflicts with the huge American export market.

De Bens and de Smaele (2001) also note that the dominance of US programs might have to do with the language and cultural proximity. In the UK for example, the majority of imports are from other English speaking countries like the US and Australia. Therefore, German films may not be picked up outside of its country because it is not applicable to many other places. On a final note, they conclude that the popularity of having these imports has had an effect over domestic series. For example, Germany made a clone of the show *Married With Children* leading to what De Bens terms the ‘Americanization’ of program genres.

The USA has always been the dominant player in the television market. However, Kunz (2010) notes that there is a difference when comparing the schedule of the prime-time networks and the public broadcasting system. PBS does in fact air quite a decent selection of programs as they are, especially from the UK. *Absolutely Fabulous*, *Monty Python* and *Green Wing* are examples of popular shows that originally aired in the UK, which were brought over to the USA on BBC America in their original format. Yet, Kunz (2010) still studied the change that has been occurring recently on prime-time networks in the USA with the development of formats. He studied the debut fall schedule for the mainstream broadcast networks over six seasons, 2004-5 through 2009-10. He found that there was an obvious absence of finished programs from outside the USA, although there were imported program formats including fictional dramas and comedies. One of the hit shows was *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?*, which originally came from the UK and was licensed to ABC for the U.S version. In his study, Kunz (2010) found that there were no foreign fictional shows that aired in their original form, as most had been adapted to U.S versions. Two such examples at the time were *Ugly Betty* and *The Office*.

The idea behind *Ugly Betty* originally came from Columbia under the name *Yo Soy Betty, la fea* (I am Betty, The Ugly). *The Office* UK was already a cult favorite on BBC America, and was produced into a US version starring Steve Carell. During Kunz's (2010) study, he found that during the 2007-8 seasons, there was an increase in the number of formatted television shows rather than original scripted shows airing on American prime-time networks. This had much to do with the Writer's Guild of America Strike after the writers walked out in November 2007 (p. 309). Because there was a loss of writers, many networks found themselves needing to borrow ideas from other

countries to fill their channels with content. ABC aired *Life on Mars*, CBS aired *Worst Week*, *Eleventh House* and *The Ex-List* and NBC aired Australian comedy *Kath and Kim*. Although *Life on Mars* (originally from the UK) was critically praised, it only lasted for one season. *Kath and Kim* lasted 17 episodes but was not renewed for a second season. Although this study shows that America does borrow ideas from other countries, the fact that this happened prominently during the writer's strike suggests that the U.S may still prefer to make their own productions from scratch. Though, there is no denying that there is more recognition towards formats such as *Ugly Betty*, which aired up to four seasons before it was cancelled.

### National Identity and Cultural Belonging

The question that remains is, why does the U.S still feel like they need to adapt a series rather than just acquire the rights to air it in the country? Especially between the USA and the UK, which share the same native language? Barker (1997) uses an example of *Coronation Street* to address this question, noting that *Coronation Street* (the world's longest running soap-opera) has not had success over in the USA, though it is one of the UK's most popular productions. He suggests that *Coronation Street* would work in the UK and not in the U.S because of cultural, rather than language, reasons. Part of this cultural difference is the way British soaps are much more committed to the use of public space than in America. Barker (1997) notes how the UK uses the corner shop, public house, street or square whereas this use of public space does not translate to Americans. Gripsrud (2007) believes that television has to be centrally located, since television is a key distributor of information and a provider of social coherence and identity. Therefore,

cultures feel the need for a common center. This is perhaps much of the reason why European markets are different in terms of their tastes and traditions (Gripsurd, 2007).

The importance of national identity has been linked to the success or failure of television shows. As Beeden and Bruin (2010) state, television encourages national identity and cultural belonging. Humor is a locally based phenomenon strongly tied into society and culture. Boskin (in Beeden and Bruin, 2010) believed that one must be familiar with the ‘cultural codes’ of a society to understand the joke. Beeden and Bruin quote Straubhaar’s theory of ‘cultural proximity’ - the idea that audiences prefer watching television programs that are close to them. Bringing on British television shows for an American audience to view will clash with what American’s view as their culture. For instance, British people do not engage very much with sports outside of football whereas sports like basketball and baseball are huge in America. The term ‘football’ in itself means two different things in the USA and the UK. Football is actually called soccer in the USA. The term ‘football’ to any typical American means American Football, an entirely different sport.

Beeden and Bruin use *The Office* to further support their theory on national identity. When *The Office* was first produced into an American version, Beeden and Bruin (2010) noted the strong opposition against this move from the British, “There was a strong belief that the originality and success of the sitcom was grounded in its ‘Britishness’ and therefore could not be reproduced in the USA”. So why then did the adaptation of *The Office* work in the U.S? Since U.S version of *The Office* is almost entirely different from the UK version, besides slight similarities to the British characters and the work-place setting, it was able to work in America. Previously, British

adaptations of shows like *Coupling* and *Men Behaving Badly* were not working in the US because they held on too closely to the British originals instead of interpreting the format to fit the American audiences (Beeden and Bruin, 2010). *The Office* UK derived much of its humor from the British class system and the political system at that time, something only British people would really understand. Other obvious differences in culture were found in the workplace, as the office workplace in the American version had a basketball court in its garage. The office also contained some American signifiers like a Simpson's toy (Beeden and Bruin, 2010). The US version saw the main character Michael using comedy to foster a community spirit, as is common in most American sitcoms.

It is apparent that today's shows relate to the national identity of its people. By keeping national identity close to home, shows have proven to be more successful with the audience. In Tay's study on *Asian Idol* (2011), an *Idol* singing competition between the South-Asian territories, she found that the show's narrative was designed so as to present each idol as a national hero. The show encouraged viewers from different countries to support their own idol. This support was found on forums and fan websites where fans would often come together to talk about their idol. Interestingly, Tay (2011) notes that linguistic barriers prevented inter-regional conversations, where even if English was used, it was often full of slang used by people from their own individual culture. One country contains people with different dialects and cultures between them. India is a good example, recognizing over 18 different languages and dialects. Tay (2011) concludes that national identity is a commercialized entity as a means of generating revenue. Without focusing on promoting national identity, viewers will not be interested in watching the shows and the show will not generate as much revenue. Reality television



programs are produced and distributed cheaply. Thus, national identity is important so people root for a representative of their country and get involved in the process. This might not work as well if audiences in Asia are only watching *American Idol*, because they are not part of the voting process and also do not relate to contestants who are from their own national states within America.

Aslama and Pantti' (2007) study of a national television show in Finland, called *Extreme Escapades*, produced findings comparable to Tay's (2011) study. Accordingly, *Extreme Escapades* is a reality show similar to the American show *Survivor*. They found that acts of national identity in *Extreme Escapades* were intentionally placed there, such as the singing of the "Finlandia Hymn". They note Andrew Higson's (1995) study on the concept of national cinema as a strategy for cultural and economic resistance against Hollywood's international domination. Perhaps then, from the study of *Extreme Escapades* and *Asian Idol*, in the mind of global production companies, national identity is a theme used to sell reality television to an audience so they can make money through adaptations and formats.

### *Preserving National Identity in Malaysia*

Banerjee (2002) shares a belief in globalization and the spread of Western television as having had a positive influence on the growth of local television in Asia. Despite the West's initial domination over television content in Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, Malaysian and Singaporean television channels are now thriving with locally produced content ever since the deregulation of television. (p. 527). Since the introduction of television in Malaysia in 1963, it has since been seen as a

powerful tool that can be used for the cultural production of national identity. Wah and Khoo (2002) note that since the beginning of television in Malaysia, the Ministry of Information stated that their goal for television was to aid in national integration in a multi-ethnic society through the use of national language.

However, Malaysia consists of extremely diverse people, with three main races being the Malays, Chinese and Indians, each with their own cultural traditions and religious views. Khattab (2006) believes that the government has tried to protect their culture through state television and discarding ‘foreign’ elements in television content. But, Khattab argues that in the process favoritism from the government has been centered on the Malay race. She writes, “The notion of asserting national identity based on the superiority of the ‘Malayrace’ continues to suture media representations and discourses modernizing Malaysia” (Khattab, 2006).

Communism and racial disharmony has been an issue in Malaysia in the past. Many argue would argue that the issue has continued into today. Rodan (2004) talks about the racial riots in 1969 that led the government to extend more control over the media. As a result, the government introduced the New Economic Policy of affirmative action in favor of the ethnic Malays. Rodan (2004) suggests that state television blanks minorities, in particular Malaysian Indians. Television in Malaysia has always been very carefully controlled and regulated by the government. Banerjee (2002) notes that three significant changes occurred in Malaysia that pressured the government to lessen its control over television. The first being technological change such as the move from terrestrial television to satellite and cable. Secondly, Malaysia wanted to grow the private sector of the economy. Finally, commercial and competitive pressures were on the rise. In

1991, Star TV was the first satellite channel in the Asia-Pacific region. During this time, there was a lot of foreign content on television because of the limitations in local production skills and finance.

However TV3, a local terrestrial channel that often broadcasted local productions, still held the highest market with 70% of national audience share. This suggests that despite the option to view content from the USA, there was still a wider appreciation for local content. In addition, efforts of localization have since taken place in Asia with the use of Asian VJ's and Anchors and Star TV has also started to carry local programming. Banerjee (2002) concludes that US domination of the global trade in media was a transitional phase and not the final stage of media globalization.

Park and Curran (2000, p. 130) believe that even with the introduction of a satellite and a cable channel in 1998, Malaysians appeared to be receiving "more of the same" content. Ownership of television remained in control of the few people aligned with the rules of the government, and so it has always been a complicated process battling between democracy and autocracy. Park and Curran (2000) suggest that for this very reason emphasis is placed on the production and importation of "safe" content like talk shows. Content should be easily marketable material and not questioning of the official discourse. On the other hand, another reason for pushing the production of local talk shows is because of cultural disconnects. This can be a problem when Malaysian audiences watch American content.

Wilson (2001) studied the way Malaysians respond to contestants on the Oprah Winfrey Show and found interesting results. From talking to a few Malaysians, he found

that Malaysians were quite taken aback by the way Americans are “So vocal” (p. 105). Malaysians are more private when it comes to talking and expressing their feelings. He notes that audiences watching contestants on the Oprah Winfrey show might be more empathetic to them if they were from Malaysia itself. Popular subjects of discussion found on talk shows in the US were not deemed worthy of debate in Malaysia, such as women’s issues, etc.

### *Endemol Malaysia*

Endemol Malaysia opened in 2008, becoming Endemol South East Asia’s new headquarters. The company opened with support from MDeC (Multimedia Development Corporation)- the custodian of MSC Malaysia. According to the MSC Malaysia website, the company’s goal is to transform the nation into a knowledge based economy driven by a knowledge society. MDeC works to support this mission and to facilitate Malaysia’s goal of becoming the preferred location for information technology and multimedia innovations, operations and services. In addition, the company also works closely with the Malaysian government implementing its policies into each company it supports. MDeC CEO, Dato' Badlisham Ghazali says, "We are very proud to have the presence of large, reputable companies such as Endemol, which will be a catalyst for Malaysia's entertainment media industry to grow further. This also further reiterates MSC Malaysia's position as a key destination for investment and relocation for creative content companies to serve the Asian market" (Endemol, 2008).

In June 2010, it was announced that Endemol Malaysia would be joining forces with ASTRO Entertainment Sdn Bhd (Sendirian Berhad meaning “private limited”) the

creation of and development of local programming for the Malaysian Market. ASTRO is Malaysia's leading cross-media group with a significant presence in Direct-to-Home Television Services, Commercial Radio and Television Programming. According to the press release, this joint venture will have access to develop local content with strong Malaysian values and cultural heritage that can be brought to the global market. Zanir Aminullah, Executive Director of ASTRO said "We are looking forward to producing Endemol's hit formats for the Malaysian market as well as jointly creating new IP that can travel internationally with the support of Endemol's global distribution might" (ASTRO to form Malaysian JV with Endemol, [asiamediajournal.com](http://asiamediajournal.com), 2010).

Before the merge, Endemol had already produced local comedies and was in pre-production for local TV movies on Astro and TV3. Endemol and Malaysia have since produced their first formatted reality television show called Kamilah Bintang, a talent search show for kids. The show was produced in its local Malaysian language. Two successful shows that have come out of Endemol Malaysia are The Money Drop and Deal or No Deal. Other shows that have been successful in the Asian region but have not reached Malaysia are 1 vs. 100 and Big Brother for broadcasters in Korea, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines.

### Chapter 3: Research Design

Endemol is the largest global production company, which has offices in many parts of the world. The company creates formats, distributes formats and in the process, builds up brand identity within the television shows. But, are these tasks shared business goals for every local Endemol office? There is limited information as far as understanding the everyday business of the local companies that make up Endemol. Magder (2004) notes that Endemol recently unveiled a new corporate strategy that hopes to use other forms of media besides television to promote content.

Accordingly, television is a success if it is able to properly reflect and convert appropriate cultural codes of the individual society. In a reserved country like Malaysia, whose government is tied strongly to religion, can then the same global goals of Endemol be applied to Malaysia? It would be interesting to zoom in on the process of ‘glocalization’ (Waisbord and Jaflin, 2009) in Malaysia, so as to understand the important filtering role of the local producers. Malaysia has also been exposed to content from the USA, as the country is a big importer of content. De Bens (1994) links this heavy importation of US content with a homogenizing effect on local people. Has this happened in Malaysia? If so why is there a desire to adapt content?

Therefore, my three main research questions are:

1. What is the process that occurs when deciding to adapt content to suit Malaysian audiences?
2. What is the role of Endemol Malaysia? How does the company work with other Endemol offices around the world?

3. What are the current and future goals for Endemol Malaysia?

## Chapter 4: Methodological Design

The purpose of this thesis is to break down the production process of Endemol by examining a local Endemol office in Malaysia. This might enable a clearer understanding of how every subsidiary of the company found throughout the world comes together creating a global production company. In this new television environment, local producers play a huge part as gatekeepers. They have the important role of filtering out themes and subjects from Endemol's database of formats to ensure content culturally translates. They have to blend global and cultural goals and shape cultural taste (Waisbord & Jaflin, 2004). Kjus (2009) talks about the fact that there are significantly more agents involved in the production process too, such as those exploiting the commercial potential of new media and the phenomenon of interactive reality television.

There is information that talks about the difference in culture between certain countries, but there is limited information dedicated to really understanding the way global companies function in local environments. However, it is an important topic considering that companies like Endemol are shaping up to be the "future of independent production" (Moss, 2010, p. 107). As Endemol continues to grow and expand overseas, it would be useful to study the process that takes place from the global headquarters to the local offices and how gatekeepers translate cultural content across the world. In Malaysia alone, there are so many factors that might influence Endemol's business in the country, such as religious influence and government regulation. However, because of Endemol's global presence and power in bringing in audience



numbers and money, Endemol might also be paving the way for a future of less regulated television in Malaysia.

In this research employees of Endemol were interviewed in order to understand the decision making process that goes into choosing the right content for Malaysian audiences. It was apparent that a qualitative research method would be the best option for this kind of study so as to verify the hypothesis based on past literature, but it would need to be confirmed by actual employees with an inside perspective. As Silverman (2004) sums it up nicely, “Those of us who aim to understand and document others understanding choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects”.

The interview would allow for the possibility of discovering new findings that may not have been uncovered from an outsider perspective. It was important to gain insight into each individual employee’s thought process when dealing with various issues as a local subsidiary of a global company. From there, it would be easy to formulate questions and discuss issues with the employees shedding some light into future plans for the company, the changing media environment in Malaysia and how this affects the everyday running of the business and their relation with Endemol Headquarters and other subsidiaries found throughout the world. Because Endemol is a private company, this information is not necessarily thought of as important information for the public to know so the best way to receive the information is simply, to ask.

The interviewees were the Format and Licensing Manager, Head of Production and the Content and Development Manager. Priest (2010) suggests that every interview

should begin with an interview schedule based on research questions. A set of questions was prepared before the interview. Maxwell (1996) said that one of the problems with interviews, as a research method, is its inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data and suggested that this problem could be resolved with audio or videotape recording. For this reason, a tape recorder was used to remain objective in the research and to avoid misinterpreting what they said during the interview. However, the interviewees were encouraged to steer off topic and to share any relevant information. Therefore, the interview questions were more open-ended than closed so as to allow a comfortable environment that might have made it more conversational.

Interviews run the risk of interpretations interfering with the results. It was essential that the employees felt able to speak for themselves. Maykut and Morehouse (1994; in Wimmer and Dominick) note that “*epoche*” was something to be considered, realizing that the researcher is the main instrument in the data collection process and therefore must try to remove viewpoints, prejudice or assumptions that might interfere with the analysis. Taking this into account, biasness was avoided as best as possible.

As noted earlier, interviewing employees of a relatively small branch of Endemol had its challenges. Because of the small size of the office, what was initially thought to be a set of individual interviews became a group interview. But this proved favorable results because the interviewees were comfortable enough (being the only three individuals who work together in the office besides the secretary) to bounce off each other and continue expanding on each other’s points. Initial worries included the interviewee’s reluctance to answer questions or the simple yes-and-no answers to questions. Thankfully, this was not the case and the interviewees were comfortable in answering the questions.

After the interview was conducted, the entire interview was transcribed. In total the length of conversation was around 30 minutes long. Because of the simplicity of the data, further analysis, other than to read and analyze what the interviewees said, was not necessary. The findings of the interview were then analyzed and compared against the literature review firstly, to spot for findings that would support the literature review and secondly, to find completely opposing or new data. Lastly, data was coded into subjects and themes so information would be easier to compare against.

## Chapter 5: Results

The interview was a success. Endemol Malaysia was extremely open to the interview, which made it a very open and comfortable one. Not only did they answer questions, but also gave further insight into the current industry of television in Malaysia. The conversation was divided into subjects and themes to easily compare what was discussed with findings gathered from the literature review.

### *Malaysia is a Voyeuristic Society*

Reality television in Malaysia is growing in popularity and this movement is affecting Malaysia as a country. Malaysia has been known for being a conservative country with strong government rule. So the question is, how does reality television, Facebook and other forms of non-conservative media go against this way of life?

*Format and Licensing Manager: "Malaysian's have more Facebook friends than any other people in the world".*

According to Time Online (Perraudin, 2010), Malaysia is the most cyber-sociable country. They study concluded that Malaysian's have the most Facebook friends, with an average of 233 digital friends per person, closely followed by Brazil with 231 and Norway with 217. According to the same study, Malaysians were the heaviest users of Facebook, spending nine hours per week on average communicating with their digital friends. Second behind Malaysia was Russia, with its people spending 8.1 hours on average per week. It was also discussed that the Malay culture likes drama and gossip, which could possibly explain the success of Endemol in Malaysia as they have mostly been formatting reality television shows.

*Endemol as a Filter for What Makes Television in Malaysia*

Endemol Malaysia's role is to provide entertaining television from around the world, while making sure that it does not conflict with the mentality or the background of the Malaysian people. According to our conversation, part of the process involves looking at the current line-up of Endemol productions and deciding which shows will work for Malaysians, and if not, how they can be adapted to work. For example, many of the Endemol shows in Europe involve using vulgarity to induce humor, which is absolutely not acceptable for Malaysian television. In movie theatres in Malaysia, vulgarity or shows with themes of sexual nature are censored even if you are over 18 and attending an over 18 movie. So having any shows with these themes on television is not acceptable in the country. This makes it complicated for Endemol Malaysia to adapt shows that have had big success in other countries, including Asian territories, like *Big Brother*.

*Format and Licensing Manager: "Everyone always said Big Brother will never be done in Malaysia and that's still the present position..."*

According to Endemol Malaysia, Big Brother contains too many themes that would not work in Malaysia. Having men and women, who do not know each other, living together, the fights and the jealousy that can take place, is all too extreme for Malaysia.

*Other Asian Territories*

Other Asian territories have adapted a lot of risqué shows that Endemol has produced in Europe and America, such as *Big Brother*. It was discussed that Indonesia

and the Philippines have both adapted *Big Brother* successfully. It is interesting to note especially how *Big Brother* was adapted in Indonesia. Although Indonesia is not an Islamic state like Malaysia, most Indonesians follow the Islam religion and it boasts the largest Islamic population in the world (88% of the population [U.S News, n.d]). However, all of the interviewees agreed that in general, Indonesia is a far more liberal society than Malaysia. To adapt *Big Brother* to an Indonesian audience, Endemol had to take away a lot of what makes *Big Brother* successful elsewhere. For instance, the development of intimate or sexual relationships was not a central theme of the show like it is in Europe and America. Instead, themes of homesickness and falling sick were the kinds of drama audiences were tuning in to watch. In addition, the house that the cast would live in was fitted in with a prayer room to avoid upsetting the culture.

On the other hand, more risqué productions have been produced in India and the Philippines. In the Philippines, *Big Brother* is a success and the casts that make up the show often become celebrities overnight. In India, the show was retitled to *Big Boss*, another indication of how even titles are changed to appeal to the country in which it is produced.

### *Appealing to the Audience in Malaysia*

Audience research is important to Endemol Malaysia before embarking on the production of a show. As Endemol Malaysia comprises of a small team, broadcasters like ASTRO usually commission the research that goes into each show. For example, before *The Money Drop* was produced in Malaysia, a focus groups study was conducted. If a new format has serious interest, Endemol might choose to do a pilot and will receive

a small commission to do so. However, unlike in the USA, pilots are not commissioned for a large budget.

As noted earlier in the literature review, in Malaysia there are predominantly three races: the Malays, the Indians and the Chinese. Endemol Malaysia decides to produce a show based on which race they choose to appeal to, as all races lead very different lifestyles and therefore have different viewing habits. Endemol Malaysia notes that for the majority of the time, they are appealing to their biggest market, which are the Malays. When they are appealing to the Malays, they have to be considerate of their religious beliefs and must choose shows that will not upset their culture.

*Content and Development Manager: "Deal or No Deal was quite a sensitive game show, because it can be seen to have a gambling element to it, that's why they didn't localize it into Bahasa Malaysia because it was not for the Malay audience, it was more for the Urban and Chinese market."*

### Language

Deciding on which language to use when adapting programs is another element Endemol Malaysia has to consider. Although adaptation usually accompanies switching to the local language, Malaysia is a unique case because the country speaks many languages. It can be argued that due to Malaysia's tourism, English is a widely spoken language. In addition, the Chinese speak Cantonese and the Indians will speak Tamil. However, the national language is Bahasa Melayu and all three races usually share this language.

Endemol Malaysia looks at their ratings for the solution, and notes that their bigger ratings come from outside the urban capital of Kuala Lumpur. They are found in the rural places, where people are not as exposed to the English language. In addition, Malaysia consists of thirteen states, each speaking their own dialect. In this case, Endemol Malaysia will try to appeal to the rural parts of Malaysia by using local dialect. Endemol Malaysia work very closely with ASTRO and note that the audience segment ASTRO is trying to capture at the moment are rural audiences and for that reason, they have to produce content locally most of the time. Endemol Malaysia also works closely with the government, who implement strict policies on how much English Language programs can be shown on local Malaysian television. The country follows a 60/40 (Malaysian local language/English content) policy on content appearing on local television, according to Endemol Malaysia. In addition, Endemol Malaysia might decide on a different language depending on the channel. NTV7, which airs a mix between English and Malaysian content, once aired a localized version of *Fear Factor* in English. They are now following the USA, in looking at how to revive *Fear Factor*, only this time to produce it in Malay.

#### *Endemol Malaysia's Focus On Being a Producer of New Formats*

In Asia, there are a few Endemol subsidiaries found throughout the region. In Hong Kong, the Endemol office there operates as a sales and administration office. Endemol Malaysia is the first Endemol subsidiary in the region to produce formats, moving away from dealing solely with the distribution of already produced Endemol formats from other regions. Endemol Malaysia has a few goals in mind. Firstly, they want to be an even bigger production hub. Since their partnership with ASTRO



television, they have slightly changed their strategy. Previously their strategy was based on sales, but now they are much more production focused than they used to be. Secondly, they not only want to produce for the region of Malaysia but they want other regions to come to them for their production needs. For example, Endemol Hong Kong in need of a new format would not only use one of Endemol Malaysia's formats for a show, but they would also use Endemol Malaysia's resources to produce the show too. Lastly, Endemol Malaysia wants to be an exporter of content for the Asian region and beyond. In the future, they hope to produce and sell formats not only locally but also globally. However, they do realize that this will depend on the kind of show they produce and whether it suits each individual country.

*The Digital Age in Endemol Malaysia's View*

*Content and Development Manager: "Television shows will always be there. What will change is the way they are broadcast, whether it's on TV, mobile, online video portals or IPTV."*

Endemol Malaysia notes the changes in the industry and how it has and potentially will affect their business. For one thing, Endemol Malaysia has noticed that the sources of funding are beginning to change. Unlike the USA, which still receives large commissions for their shows, Endemol Malaysia is beginning to notice that a lot of money comes from brands and advertising. The rise of brand funded entertainment in on the increase and with that trend, entertainment is moving across different platforms. Companies investing into Asian productions tend to look at entertainment or

programming content from a campaign basis. They want to be able to promote content through television, online and social media, on ground, etc.

Endemol Malaysia also employs a second screen where viewers can text in comments and tweet. During the airing of a show, a second screen is usually shown in a smaller box in the corner of the screen. Viewers can then text in their comments as the show goes on, becoming more of a chat box to share opinions on the happenings taking place. The company believes there is an increasing interest from broadcasters to make use of this new technology, but they do not have the numbers yet for Asia to know whether this type of investment into this use of technology will perform well. In general, Malaysia still lacks the broadband connectivity to get people involved in using the technology. However, Endemol Malaysia sees the changes occurring in the way television is broadcast as a good thing. They see the potential for more clients, whether those are brands, broadcast companies or technology companies. In the past, they have partnered directly with companies, such as Nokia, to produce content that will go on Nokia phones. In other words, Endemol Malaysia is moving away from a model where production companies only worked with broadcasters.

### *The Future of Television*

Endemol Malaysia is confident that reality TV in general is not going anywhere for a while. They say that there is still strong interest in reality TV as proven from ratings and profit. Reality TV changes according to society, so as long as they are coming up with products that are still updated according to the society in which it airs, they do not believe they have a problem. For example, Endemol's most famous example, *Big*

*Brother*, has been airing for years in many different places according to the reality of each place and time.

Endemol UK established Zeppotron, one of the UK's leading comedy and entertainment production companies that specifically produce many successful drama shows (Endemol, 2012). But as for now, Endemol Malaysia is not interested in following other subsidiaries of Endemol in formatting a drama. For one thing, Endemol Malaysia states that they do not have the time to approach this genre as they are focusing all of their resources towards producing reality television shows. Endemol Malaysia comprises of only a few people, in a small office, and are therefore still in the growing phases. They focus mainly on bigger productions to attract bigger investments, hence the partnership with ASTRO. Secondly, the drama genre is being handled well by local producers in Malaysia. They have a long track record of producing strong shows and Endemol Malaysia does not believe that as for now, they are needed in this area.

However, Endemol Malaysia is open to the possibility of expansion into the drama genre in the future, if the investors are interested in this area.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### *The role of Endemol Malaysia as Gatekeeper*

Malaysia is an Islamic country and has been known to implement strong religious rule over the country's political system and its people. This has resulted in struggles with freedom of speech and a filtering of the media and outside sources of information that the government may not agree with. One can say this represents how conservative Malaysians might be because the society in which they live is so strongly governed over. On the other hand, there are surprising figures that suggest Malaysians have the most Facebook friends and use Facebook more often than people from other countries. In addition, Malaysia is seeing a lot of influence coming in from the West because high quality products are produced from that side and brought over.

Malaysia is still developing as a country and only since 1991, introduced the first satellite television company that broadcasted international content. The country felt they had to introduce satellite TV because of commercial and competitive pressures (Banerjee, 2002), but it is clear that this was a small shift away from their attempt to remain protective of their cultural values. With satellite TV came the import of Western content, which arguably has influenced and changed Malaysian society's own cultural values.

So, media managers now have to please two sides: the government and the people. This is an interesting job for three media managers at Endemol Malaysia who are placed in-between two different cultures, trying to strike a balance. The government has not moved from their stance against promoting freedom of speech and to avoid any new movements that might challenge its regime. The people, on the other hand, are thrown in

a mix of strong government rule and the knowledge of what is out there. Because of globalization, it is inevitable that some cultural and social values are now being shared. Facebook is only one social media tool out there that can connect people from all over the world. The question then remains, what can media managers do to strike a balance? Park and Curran (2000) noted that for this very reason, a lot of “safe” content like talk shows are produced because they are easily marketable and not questioning of the official discourse.

After speaking to Endemol Malaysia, this is the trend that seems to be occurring. The government’s rule on 60/40 content on television, with the higher number being localized content, indicates that they are trying to regain control of their media. Having Endemol Malaysia produce successful Western shows into localized, filtered versions is better than having the Western imported version. At the same time, the government is trying to provide entertainment to keep the masses happy with the variation of different content. Arguably, the “safest” content lies within the genres of talk show and reality television. They are also the cheapest to produce and bring in the most advertising, so Malaysia is commercially doing well while taking control of what they produce.

The team at Endemol Malaysia has the task of adapting content to suit audience needs while respecting government regulation. Their role is to act as gatekeepers and to decide what will or will not work both for the people and the government. Endemol as a global company cannot dedicate the time to research each individual market and so each subsidiary of Endemol likely has to go through a process of deciding what will work for its market. In Endemol Malaysia’s case, they are very sensitive to the local culture, rather than the expatriate or tourist culture. Therefore the shows they produce tend to avoid

using profanity, sexual references, violence, references to drugs or alcohol, which are commonly found in adaptations of Endemol productions elsewhere. But, at the same time, they are also trying to provide entertaining shows that will attract the local audience. Endemol Malaysia seems to be handling this job well, being able to produce shows that do not quite go overboard like other reality shows do, but are still able to maintain good ratings.

### *Endemol Malaysia's Focus on the Malays*

Endemol Malaysia's biggest target market is the Malay race. They contribute highly to the ratings of local productions and are also the biggest race in Malaysia. For these reasons, the ideal target market for broadcasters and producers would be the Malays. However, the majority of the Malay race is Muslim, as they are required by law to follow this faith. This makes the allowance for any "slips" of inappropriate material very limited. Endemol Malaysia has to be careful not to upset the religious majority, which is also their biggest target market. This reason alone might explain why localized content is often very conservative and tame compared to the West and even other Asian regions. When adapting *Deal or No Deal*, they could not advertise it to the Malays because it violated a lot of their beliefs. Additionally, as noted earlier, the government has been trying to regain control over content by removing foreign content from reigning over local content. Khattab (2006) says that in the process, this has resulted in favoritism from the government centered towards the Malay race.

It does seem that Endemol Malaysia disperses content quite fairly, although they do strongly target the Malay race. Using the example of *Deal or No Deal*, they knew that

this would likely offend the Malay culture, but they still decided to adapt the show targeting it instead to the Malaysian Chinese audience. I would therefore argue that although Endemol Malaysia does work closely with the government, they are still a foreign company that is trying to attract investors in this region. They are interested in making a profit, at the end of the day, but it just so happens that the money is often in the ratings and the strong ratings come from the Malay race.

### *Changing Technologies*

Endemol Malaysia not only has to choose what content to adapt, but they also choose how to adapt content. The way in which people watch television content is constantly changing and Endemol Malaysia is more than aware of the changing environment. However, they do face a number of obstacles that make it difficult to produce shows. In the USA, more money is pumped into shows and the entertainment industry is generally much larger than it is in Malaysia. This makes it easier in America to produce shows that bring in more advertisers and therefore, more money. Endemol Malaysia will often follow by example and will buy rights to successful shows that have worked overseas, as they do not receive a lot of money to produce their own shows. For *Deal or No Deal* produced in America, the cash reward was \$1,000,000. For the adaptation in Malaysia, contestants would receive a much smaller cash reward of RM 100,000 (approximately 32,685.1 U.S. dollars). Endemol Malaysia is therefore more cautious when approaching new projects simply because they do not have the money to lose. *Deal or No Deal* was a promising venture for Endemol Malaysia, so they did invest into the production.

However, Endemol Malaysia produces at a slower rate than Endemol Europe for a number of reasons. They do not have the same amount of resources that they do in Europe or in the USA. They are a small number for now and do tend to focus their efforts on a single project at a time. Unlike in the USA, which has the money and resources to juggle multiple projects at a time. If one project fails, they cancel shows and move on. For Endemol Malaysia, the risk of taking on a new project is weighed heavily before embarking on new productions. Technology in the USA is also much more advanced than it is in Malaysia.

Endemol Malaysia notes the growing interest from broadcasters and advertisers in using new technology to watch television. They are also interested in multi-platform delivery because they want to make more money from a single project. A project undertaken by Endemol Malaysia is therefore often thoroughly thought through because if they waste their small amount of resources, they often lose too much time and money. The only limitation to this is the fact that they are still not entirely familiar with these new technologies and it remains as for now, a work in progress.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Endemol Malaysia still primarily functions as a distributor of content. They do not directly distribute content, but instead adapt and filter content coming from other regions to fit the society of Malaysia. This is an extremely important role and they carry the responsibility of pleasing both the government and the people of Malaysia. As commonly found in most developing countries, the company tends to follow rather than to present new ideas. This is simply because of low resources in a smaller industry.

The Endemol brand as a whole is developing and growing in different directions, such as the expansion into the drama genre and the use of new technologies. However, Endemol Malaysia prefers to take already established shows that present lower risks. They are not interested right now in expanding into the drama genre, because the area does not fall in its comfort zone for now. It does not allow for cheap production with a larger return on investment. Reality television shows are known to be less risky, despite its criticism of being less intellectual, since the simple nature of the show attracts steady viewership. These shows have also proven to be successful in the Asian region specifically, such as the success of *Big Brother* in the Philippines and in Indonesia.

But, Endemol Malaysia is also moving away from their role of being mainly a filter and distributor. The first step for them is to expand by working together with other broadcasters in Malaysia, to start producing bigger and better productions. They are also interested in becoming a more prominent production company, producing their own local productions from scratch. Lastly, they hope to take these new productions and to start selling them to other regions found in the U.S and European divisions of Endemol. This

is not only the goal of the company, but also the goal of the country, to expand and grow its entertainment economy and to put Malaysia on the map.

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